

CURRENT TRENDS AND PRIORITIES.

By

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by

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Helen Keller stated that the deaf-blind are "the loneliest people on earth." They certainly are difficult to find and to learn about. Although it is certainly clear that there is more activity relating to the deaf-blind in more countries and on different levels than ever before, anything approaching an accurate survey seems to be quite impossible.

In considering the world as a whole, as an international seminar attempts to do, it is noted that there is a great difference between the situation in the United States and in the rest of the world. In America, the problem is that there are literally hundreds of programs for deaf-blind children, varying greatly in the number of children involved, nearly all of which have come into existence in the last five or six years. Their effectiveness has not yet been proven. New programs are still being developed.

Away from the States, programs are few in number, involving mere handfuls of children, including in some cases a solitary child.

Probably the best source of information to date will have been the seminar now ending. Had this paper been written today instead of some weeks before, it might well be much more informative.

I am assuming that the seminar will provide much information about programs in Australia and North America, and will consider at this time more

particularly the lesser known parts of the world.

There are interesting developments in two countries which have significance, I think, because they are so different in their approach that they are worth considering and comparing. These are West Germany and Japan.

Hannover, West Germany

The new program at Hannover is doubtless known to all of you to some degree. Growing out of a special program for deaf-blind children in the nearby school for the blind, it is housed in handsome buildings planned solely for deaf-blind children and adults. Children are admitted from all parts of the country. The educational program is well organized with small groups of children sharing a classroom-playroom-living room and sleeping area. Vocational training is emphasized, and children finishing school are able to advance into a workshop program, and presumably become permanent residents. At full capacity, as many as a hundred deaf-blind children may be served.

This is typical of an approach which brings deaf-blind children together into special facilities constructed for their needs.

Japan

In contrast to this, the Japanese have decided to leave their children, as far as possible, in their own communities.

The first fact to note here is that it is only since 1966 that there has been any recognition in Japan that many deaf-blind children existed. In 1949, a program involving three children was started at the Yamanashi School for the Blind as a pilot project with the advice of Dr. Umezu, Professor at Tokyo University. However, since 1966, a determined effort has been made to identify the deaf-blind of Japan and the latest figures available assume that there are 700 deaf-blind children and adults in the country.

The latest figures now indicate that there are 17 deaf-blind pupils attending 7 schools for the blind. There are 3 pupils in the Hiroshima School for the Deaf, and 5 deaf-blind children are being taught by itinerant teachers in their homes.

This campaign to identify the deaf-blind has received unusual support from Mr. Michiko Sakata, a member of the Board of the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind, whose Director, Mr. Iketa Imamura, and his daughter, Dr. Sadako Imamura, have shown a keen interest in the program. Mr. Sakata at one time was Minister of Education in the Japanese Central Government and is currently a Minister of Defense. He obtained the invaluable support of the Chief Japanese Broadcasting Company, NHK, who have made several films on the deaf-blind and have given publicity to the subject in repeated ways. Under Mr. Sakata's leadership the National Research Institute of Special Education was established in 1971 which has been able to offer research and other facilities to the deaf-blind.

The contrast between the programs in Germany and Japan are great. In Germany, a program designed solely for the deaf-blind and encompassing their entire lives from childhood to old age has been established. In Japan, a maximum effort is being made to integrate the children, if not into the regular schools, at least into schools for the blind or deaf. A major effort is made to involve the whole family in the child's program. During the World Conference on the Deaf in August 1975, many of these children and their parents were brought to Tokyo for two days of consultation and a socialization. When it is realized that as recently as 1966, only three deaf-blind children were receiving any education in the country, the change is ~~unprecedented~~ encouraging.

There is no basis at present for comparing the effectiveness of these two approaches. Not for a generation or more will statistical evidence of any

kind be available which would be meaningful. Allowances must also be made for the different attitudes of the German and Japanese people towards the handicapped. What might work well in one country might be disastrous in another. It is good that we have two such well-organized programs following such different paths for us to study.

Africa

In the Continent of Africa, it has been extremely difficult to obtain even the recognition that deaf-blind children exist. With the exception of the Republic of South Africa, where three programs exist for the deafblind, the deaf-blind seem to be virtually non-existent. However, within the past eighteen months I have half a dozen boys and girls at the Ibadan School for the Deaf with serious visual problems, and the Principal of that school has just returned to Ibadan after completing the Boston College-Perkins Training Program. He will be able to provide these children with some of the special services they so badly need. None of these children are completely blind.

In Kenya, it has been known that a small group of deaf-blind children have existed for several years. Recently they have been placed in St. Lucy's School for the Blind. I have not seen these children. The Headmaster of a school for the blind in Nakuru has also just completed the Boston College-Perkins Course, and he is making plans to transfer these deaf-blind children to Nakuru. In Nairobi in March, I saw a 7 year old boy completely deaf and blind, and possibly retarded. Miss Joan Shilleeds of Concord has kindly arranged to examine him on her way home from Australia.

To say there is a trend in Africa is perhaps to overstate the case. Undoubtedly, these two men who have just received their training will run into many difficulties before it can be said that programs are established. However, there are the glimmerings of hope. Certainly, if children of this type do exist

in Nigeria and in Kenya, they also must exist in many other parts of the Great Continent.

India

In India also there have been some recent developments. Only three truly deaf-blind persons have been identified, a typical rubella boy now about 9 years who is being educated in a speech clinic in Bombay, a young woman with a little sight and hearing who has been educated by her wealthy family also in Bombay, and a boy in Indore about whom I know very little.

However, it was learned that a number of totally blind young men in schools for the blind in Gujarat State were having hearing problems which were getting worse. With Mr. Suresh Ahuja, the Head of the National Association of the Blind of India, I met a number of these young men. Their medical records, updated for our visit, indicated they could benefit greatly from surgery. Mr. Ahuja was able to arrange this for them without charge and was able also to make plans for postoperative care and counseling. The authorities in Gujarat were most cooperative and promised a report of progress in a year's time. I have not seen this report but Mr. Ahuja told me recently that some, and perhaps all of the young men, had refused to submit to surgery.

In the meantime, appeals have been made to Mr. Ahuja for help with hearing aids from a school for the blind in Madras. There is a growing recognition that any kind of hearing loss combined with blindness, or visual loss combined with deafness, should be treated as seriously.

South America

There have been small programs for the deaf-blind for some years in Cordoba, Argentina, and intermittently in San Paulo, Brazil. However, in the latter country there are apparently significant developments. Next November, there will be a seminar on Education of the Deaf-Blind in San Paulo and this

will be through the sponsorship of the Brazilian Association for the Education of the Blind, and more significantly still, the National Center of Special Education which is a federal organ of the Brazilian Ministry of Education. It would be nice to say that there is a trend toward the acceptance of responsibility for the deaf-blind by federal governments. Certainly, the program in Kenya has the official support of the Ministry of Education, and as far as I know, the acceptance by the Brazilian Ministry of some responsibility is a unique development in Latin America. Perhaps this is the beginning of a trend.

Publications

I think a recent development of another kind should be mentioned. This is the writing and publications of books and papers dealing with the deaf-blind. Our Research Library, which published a 77 page Bibliography on the Education of the Deaf-Blind in August 1972, finds it necessary to publish frequent supplements. Papers listed as available from Perkins are in much demand. Sometimes as many as a hundred requests are received for a document. The requests for our films on the deaf-blind are increasing all the time, and we have several hundred copies in constant circulation. Through the newsletter, "Children of the Silent Night", an attempt is made to keep workers in the field in touch with new publications. This newsletter goes out free of charge to people all over the world, and the numbers of requests which are received for documents listed in it indicate that it is serving a good purpose.

Conferences

Panels on the deaf-blind have been included in the programs of several international conferences recently. At the World Conference on the Deaf in Tokyo in August 1975, about 60 people heard three fine papers by Japanese men who were working with deaf-blind pupils. Almost at the same time Mr. Richard Kinney, the Chairman of the Deaf-Blind Committee of the World Council for the

Welfare of the Blind, was appearing on the program of the International Conference of the Deaf in Washington, D.C. Within the last few weeks at the XIIIth World Conference of Rehabilitation International in Tel Aviv in June 1976, about 60 people attended a panel on the subject. A wide variety of countries was represented in the audience.

Moving Towards Adulthood

Although I have refrained from discussing the problems in the United States with the expectation that these will have been explored rather thoroughly during this seminar, it should be pointed out that major interest is being shown in preparing the deaf-blind pupils now in school for adulthood. During last year, a conference entitled "1980 is Now" under federal sponsorship drew attention to the fact that by 1980 hundreds of rubella deaf-blind children would be passing from school to adult life. I found this subject a matter of great interest in Japan also, and the publication by Mr. S. O. Meyers of his remarkable report "Where Are They Now" which includes among other multihandicapped blind youth, a group of deaf-blind. The British are also concerned about this matter.

In the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and perhaps elsewhere, there is also an increased interest in involving the parents and members of the child's community in the problems of the deaf-blind.

The Program Committee of this seminar have taken notice of these trends.

Priorities

It is not easy to speculate on what should be ~~the~~ priorities for the future. No two persons, including the deaf-blind, have the same priorities, and probably neither do any two agencies. However, I do sense two movements. One is toward upgrading the qualifications not only of teachers but teachers'

aides and child care workers. Perhaps the highest priority should be put on establishing more training facilities not only for teachers but for auxiliary workers.

The other is in the area of political action, to persuade governmental bodies, both in education and still more in rehabilitation, to become involved in the problems of this small minority among minorities who suffer from visual and auditory deficiencies.

Helen Keller described the deaf-blind not only as the loneliest people on earth but as the most neglected. In spite of the progress of recent years, this is still true. However, there are signs that this neglect is lessening and we can look forward to the time when services for the deaf-blind will be on at least as high a level as those available for the blind or for the deaf.

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